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Afghan rebels adapt to modern warfare

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> NORTHWEST FRONTIER PROVINCE, Pakistan - With a twist of the wrist the plunger is pushed, and with a roar the explosion sends a plume of dirt and rocks skyward. The sound echoes off the brown hills, and the smell of cordite wafts over a gleeful assembly of Afghans.

> This is a training camp for the Afghan resistance, the "mujahedeen," or holy warriors, who have been fighting the government in Kabul since the communist coup of 1978 and, since December 1979. the Russian army, too.

> There are dozens of camps like this spread out along the Pakistan-Afghan frontier within a few miles of the border. It is a kind of no man's land, beyond the last Pakistani police post but not quite in Afghanistan. From time to time Afghan jets bomb the border regions, both to put pressure on the Pakistanis for allowing the mujahedeen sanctuary and to disrupt the resistance base camps.

> Here, and in places like it, the resistance fighters are taught how to use modern weapons of war. the rudiments of commando tactics and how to blow things up. They take to it enthusiastically.

> Although the Afghans are brilliant guerrilla fighters with an inbred sense of terrain, fighting a sophisticated modern army takes training. "Any fool can fire a mortar," said an instructor, "but if you don't hit somebody with it by the third round he is going to be on top of you.'

> There are targets painted on the hillside where the mujahedeen can practice firing the heavy and light machine guns, grenadelaunchers and recoilless rifles that the Chinese give them. The Chinese weapons are similar to the Soviets' and thus can be used interchangeably with whatever the mujahedeen capture from the Russians and their Afghan surrogates. Between two peaks strung

on a wire, there is even a model aircraft on which to practice.

In another part of this base is a sabotage school where resistance recruits learn how to make their own weapons. "It is much easier to buy these pipes, which we can get in the Kabul market, and make bombs out of them than it is to try to smuggle grenades into the city," said the instructor. Picking up a Molotov cocktail, which is a bottle filled with gasoline, he explained that "when you add soap and the white of eggs to the petrol it sticks to the target exactly like

napalm.'

In the seven years since the Soviets sent their expeditionary force into Afghanistan to save the communist government in Kabul, the tactics on both sides have changed and the war has become ever more cruel and relentless. The hard fact for the Soviets is that despite their overwhelming superiority in firepower, they have not been able to subdue the population, and today they exercise real control only over the major towns and the main roads. Even then, according to mujahedeen and Western sources who have been there, whole areas of Kandahar, Afganistan's second city, are under rebel control most of the time.

Since the resistance cannot defeat the Soviets militarily, as in most guerrilla wars, it has become a war of attrition - a contest of wills to see who will tire first.

er the years the Soviets have their tactics, according mujahedeen and other sources.

teas in the early days of the like simply drove their huge they simply drove their huge country to be ambushed, are now using small, highly and continuerrille strike forces. the now using small, highly side antiguerrilla strike forces. move a column of trucks and anks they will, according to the bijanedeen, send out helicopterborne assault troops to take all the important high ground overlooking the route.

If they get wind of guerrilla activity, the Soviets will land troops behind the rebels to cut off their

The Soviets have turned much of Afghanistan into a free-fire zone, which has had the effect of depopulating the countryside. People have been forced into the towns, where the Soviets can control them better, or across the border into Pakistan and Iran. Approximately 5 million Afghans are living in exile, the world's largest refugee group.

This has deprived the mujahedeen of much of their support in the countryside. The guerrillas can no longer count on local villagers to feed them everywhere they go because in many areas there are no villages left. The guerrillas must carry their food with them, which cuts down their mobility.

The Soviets have become very proficient in mine warfare, the guerrillas say, and they sow the passes with deadly antipersonnel mines, which the mujahedeen columns stumble on in the night.

The most feared Soviet weapon is the "Hind" armored helicopter gunship, which, in a treeless terrain, is a devastating antiguerrilla weapon. But American "Stinger" heat-seeking antiaircraft missiles which are not fooled by decoy flares – are making their way into the hands of the resistance.

Estimates are that the guerrillas are shooting down at least one Soviet aircraft a day, but, as one source here put it, "more important than shooting Soviet planes down, the Stingers are keeping them up." The Soviet pilots are becoming cautious about bringing their planes and helicopters down low for fear of Stingers, which have a range of 5 miles. And this is a great advantage for the guer-

Meanwhile, the mujahedeen are breaking up into smaller bands in order to counter the Sovi-

According to the guerrillas, the Russians have also vastly improved their intelligence network.

But if the Soviets are improv-



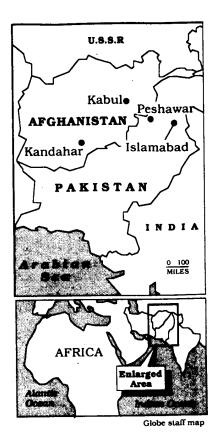
ing their intelligence, so are the resistance fighters. The Soviet allies, the progovernment Afghan forces, are riddled with informers who tip the guerrillas off about impending operations on a regular basis, according to the mujahedeen.

The guerrillas say they have become much more proficient in bringing the war into the cities and that their sabotage operations in the heart of the capital, for example, are much better organized than a few years ago.

In the early years of the war, the Soviets found that some of their Moslem troops, from the Soviet republics next to Afghanistan, had no heart for fighting their Moslem brethren; there were many defections. According to the mujahedeen, the Soviets have been having discipline problems with their Ukrainian troops as well.

The Soviets have about 115,000 troops in Afghanistan, and between 25,000 and 30,000 of them have been killed or wounded since 1979.

The mujahedeen number about 100,000 at any one time, but since they are an irregular force whose fighters rotate in and out of the war, it is hard to calculate their strength accurately. According to



best estimates among Western, Pakistani and Afghan sources, however, more than half a million

Afghans have lost their lives since the Soviet invasion.